

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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“Help for Heroes” video tells story of veterans’ courts, veterans’ triumphs

LANSING, MI, May 24, 2013 – Veterans’ struggles with substance abuse and emotional trauma end in victory in “Help for Heroes,” the newest episode in *Court Stories*, the Michigan Supreme Court’s online video series.

“Help for Heroes” features interviews with veterans who completed the 17th District Court’s “Veterans Court” program in Redford. 17th District Court Chief Judge Karen Khalil said she started the program after seeing offenders come before her who were veterans or on leave from military service.

“Not all veterans’ wounds are visible; some are emotional and mental, and these need healing just as physical wounds do,” noted Khalil. “Some of my cases involved offenders who were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or were using drugs and alcohol to self-medicate, and they got in trouble with the law as a result. It was clear to me that they needed, and deserved, a better response than just being locked up.”

Veterans’ courts focus on counseling, mental health treatment, and other services to get at the root of offenders’ destructive behaviors. Each veteran works with a mentor who is also a veteran, explained Judge David Jordon, who started a veterans’ court at the 54B District Court in East Lansing.

Jordon, now retired, recalled how a veteran suffered a flashback as police quelled a riot in East Lansing. “He thought he was back in Iraq. His training, and the stress of being in combat situations, had hard-wired him for that kind of response – the kind of behavior that got him arrested,” Jordon said.

“When they sign up, people in military service sign a blank check to the U.S. to give everything up to and including their lives,” Jordon added. “How can we not give back to them?”

The veterans’ court program is not easy, and demands hard work and commitment from participants, the judges said. “It’s a lot harder to do 18 months of probation, counseling, and all the other requirements than it is to do a short stint in jail,” Jordon observed.

Veterans who complete all the requirements of a veterans’ court program avoid incarceration, “but much more importantly, they break the cycle of destructive behavior that would otherwise lead to repeated offenses and incarceration,” Khalil added. “Veterans court graduates are less likely to reoffend, and the program saves money, compared to the cost of jails

and prisons. Veterans court is good for veterans, it's good for taxpayers, and it's good for the community.”

Design and editing for “Help for Heroes” was provided by Michigan Creative in East Lansing.

Court Stories tells the everyday stories of Michigan courts and the people they serve. The series is on the “Michigan Courts” [YouTube channel](#) and on the Court’s web site.

New *Court Stories* videos will be announced as they are posted to the “Michigan Courts” YouTube channel, <http://www.youtube.com/user/MichiganCourts?feature=plcp> , and the Michigan Courts “One Court of Justice” web site.



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